



# PERCEIVED RETURNS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY ON SOME COLLEGE STUDENTS OF JABALPUR

Dr. Sutapa Roy<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Nita Mitra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, St. Aloysius' College (Autonomous), Jabalpur, M.P.

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Siliguri B.Ed. College, W.B.

## ABSTRACT

The paper reports the perceived returns of higher education for some first-semester college students of Jabalpur, M.P., India. It followed a previous study that was conducted for class XII students of Siliguri, W.B., India. The findings indicate a more or less similar pattern. In addition, the present paper identifies a gap, as was pointed out by Jensen (2010), between the perceived return of education for the students and the actual potential return. The students preferred subjects like management over science subjects at the graduation level with the hope of getting better job opportunities. It has been opined based on conceptual analysis that the contemporary market is heading towards Gig-economy that promotes project-based short-term employment which has the threat of uncertainty and at the same time has the advantage of flexibility. This job-market situation calls for nurturing critical thinking, life-skill development with an emphasis on professional collaboration, the approach of an entrepreneur and life-long learning. It has been suggested that among several options, the active learning strategy and the concept-point-recovery (CPR) approach (Cho, Melloch and Levesque-Bristol, 2021), change from a surface-learning approach to a deep-learning approach and vice-versa (Xie, Zhang and King, 2022) and maintaining appropriate learning environment may be effective (Ahmed, Taha, Alneel and Gaffar, 2018).

**KEYWORDS:** Perceived Return of Education; Actual Potential Return of Education; Gig-Economy; Critical Thinking; Collaboration; Entrepreneurship; Life-Long Learning; Mentoring

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While studying the psychological changes of students over time one of the most important aspects is learning. Students learn formally and informally. The theories of learning change or develop depending on new observations or new interpretations. But those do not modify with environmental changes. The environmental changes come as inputs of an operating system for which the learning outcomes may differ if the initial conditions or inputs differ. The inputs include the physiology of the learner, the choice of the individual and the environmental intervention. However, 'choice' is strongly dominated by the information coming from the environment and other parameters like interest, aptitude, and motivation of an individual. Also, the choice is prominent in young adults (like those under study in this paper) compared to children. Economists (e.g. Jensen, 2010) opine that, choices are not always made objectively. Rather, choices are made on perceived returns. According to Jensen (2010), "Economists emphasize the link between market returns to education and investments in schooling. Though many studies estimate these returns with earnings data, it is the perceived returns that affect schooling decisions, and these perceptions may be inaccurate". In the contemporary scenario, the economic situation is uncertain. Accordingly, the expected economic returns for any educational investment are also uncertain. The possibility of deviations of the perceived returns from actual returns becomes high. It becomes imperative to mentor young minds for minimising the gap. The present study proceeds in line with a previous study (Mitra, 2023) where a case study with XII Students in Siliguri (West Bengal) on perceived returns of Higher Education was done.

## 2. REVIEW:

The study of Mitra (2023) was conducted on 36 (thirty-six) XII students for observing their perceived returns to Higher

Education. The perceived returns were job-oriented having awareness of the scarcity of the job market. The students seemed to be under-informed. At least 30% of them were aware of the importance of information. The study could not detect any significant variation between boys and girls relating to the perceived returns. The paper depended on three documents: one by Jensen (2010); another by Montenegro and Patrinos (2014); and the last one by Samreen (2017).

Jensen (2010) reported the survey results for eighth-grade boys in the Dominican Republic. The perceived returns to secondary schools were found to be severely low. In that context, the researcher felt the need for the availability of accurate information on the returns for schooling to the students.

The Policy Research Working Paper 7020 by Montenegro and Patrinos (2014) was on data available for more than sixty years starting from 1950 from 139 global economies. Out of six major findings that were reported one was like this: the returns to schooling were higher for women than men.

The research of Samreen (2017) has been reported in his thesis. The researcher investigated the reasons behind low schooling among the Muslim community of the Aligarh district of Western U.P. It was hypothesized and verified the gap between the perceived returns to schooling and actual returns is one of the major reasons for the low effective enrolment in that area. However, here the perception of the parents or guardians was studied.

From the above research works we get a direction for the present investigation. In this connection, we took the help of three more research reports which helped us to look into the psychological changes of first-semester undergraduate students relating to

learning choices compared to previous trends.

Ahmed, Taha, Alneel and Gaffar (2018) observed a significant difference in the perception of the learning environment between high achievers and low achievers. The learning environment involved everything that was going on in the campus starting from teaching, facilities to study, peer interaction etc.

Cho, Melloch and Levesque-Bristol (2021) performed an interesting study involving the concept-point-recovery strategy (CPR) of teaching that leads to a higher level of perception of the learning environment by the students.

Xie, Zhang and King (2022) made one interesting observation depending on a mixed-method study on why students change their learning approaches. The researchers investigated the changeability of learning approaches adopted by students in two parts. In the first part, they studied more than 350 university students through pre-test and post-test in a longitudinal design. In the second part of the research, the researchers selected 26 students and performed qualitative interviews. It was observed that several factors like assessment patterns, and teacher's quality contributed to the changes in learning attitudes. The changes were also influenced by academic disciplines or years of study. The changes in learning approaches involved mostly from deep learning to surface learning. A surface learning approach is involved in short-term objectives with less amount of energy input, whereas deep learning involves serious involvement in a study aiming at thorough understanding. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive. A student may adopt both approaches based on the immediate target or different subjects.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The research questions are related to first-semester college students. Henceforth in this paper, such students will be mentioned as 'students.'

Questions to which answers have been sought in this paper are:

**R1:** Do the perceived returns of education associated with the students of undergraduate programs deviate from the actual potential returns?

**R2:** How can the gap between the perceived return of education and the actual potential return be shortened through mentoring?

### 4. METHODOLOGY:

- *Relating to Research Question  $R_1$ :* For identifying the perception of the students, a qualitative approach has been adopted. Responses from the students were collected through a semi-structured interview in the form of a questionnaire (distributed through Google form) which has been placed in Table number 2.
- *Relating to Research Question  $R_2$ :* Conceptual analysis of the data available from those obtained while exploring research question R1 (Table number 2) has been made.

#### • Sampling:

The sampling was purposive and it was based upon convenience.

*Population:* All the undergraduate students in Jabalpur studying in first semester.

*Sample:* Those who responded to a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms.

Residential location: Rural			Residential location: Urban			Grand Total
Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	125
13	8	21	78	26	104	

**Table-1: Sample of students responded**

- **Delimitation:** The study has been conducted on the college students of Jabalpur.

### 5.FINDINGS:

#### *1) Relating to the research question $R_1$ :*

S.N.	FINDINGS
1	There was awareness among the participating students about the decrease in market demand for conventional jobs.
2	There was an urge for career-oriented learning among the participating students.
3	Demand for motivation rather than information relating to Higher Education and job opportunities was observed among the participants.
4	State of being under-informed about returns to alternate educational avenues was noticed.
5	Participation of science undergraduates was quite low (about 10%).
6	Motivational level of Science graduates was pretty low. Nobody in that category expressed the urge for pursuing the subject seriously, for example doing honours, P.G., Ph.D. and then going for teaching or research.
7	One student of the science undergraduates, however, wished to be an entrepreneur.
8	Almost 90% of the participating students are Management/BBA students. All of them wanted to pursue further studies in the same direction.
9	One student out of the Management/BBA students who responded to the questionnaire expressed interest in studying human behaviour.
10	Less than 5% of the Management/BBA students expressed willingness to become entrepreneurs.
11	About 5% of the participating students were willing to take on the challenge of getting civil services.

**Table 2: Findings available from the qualitative analysis of the responses of the participants**

#### *ii) Relating to the research question $R_2$ :*

Several secondary findings follow from the findings noted in Table-2. We present here only those which relate to objective 2.

- Very few opted for graduation with science subjects. There has been an almost complete refusal to pursue a subject (irrespective of whether the subject is science-based or not) for teaching or research.
- It appears that students feel:
  - Going for higher education with science subjects is not rewarding in the prevailing situation. Because,
    - Jobs that depend upon science subjects only are decreasing in number.
    - The study of science subjects is much more difficult and involving compared to other subjects.
    - Jobs or work opportunities which are available do not require science subjects as essential combinations.
  - Pursuing subjects like Management/BBA may be more worthwhile which may offer better job opportunities in the private sector. At the same time, such graduations will make a student eligible for civil services.

- c) Astonishingly, only a few numbers of this large number of students who confidently opted for management/BBA preferred entrepreneurship as a career option.

## 6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

### i) Relating to the research question $R_1$ :

There were prominent marks of deviations of the perceived returns of education associated with the students of an undergraduate program from the actual potential returns.

The perceived return for the students is:

- Subjects like management/BBA are much more rewarding than science subjects so far as the availability of good jobs is concerned.

Actual potential returns are:

- The nature of the job market has changed. It has become uncertain and dominated by Gig-economy, meaning where job opportunities are project-based and temporary. Once the project is over, the job also vanishes. The positive side of this economy includes freedom of making choices, flexibility etc. However, many fail to see the prerequisites for being successful in this economy. One has to be a lifelong learner, able to think critically, able to collaborate professionally and like others. To be precise, one has to internalize the approach of an entrepreneur irrespective of being in the area of academics, research, services, business, or in any other professional field.
- The uncertainty in the job is true equally for science subjects and other subjects like management. Rather, one has to live with one's natural tastes and aptitudes. While remaining with those, one has to sharpen critical thinking abilities, life-skills with an emphasis on collaboration. One has to be a life-long learner not merely as a scholar, but as an entrepreneur harnessing new opportunities of getting desired returns.

Hence, the deviation lies in the fact that

The students are more concerned with the economic returns for different educational investments in the form of pursuing different academic subjects whereas the actual market demands critical thinking, collaboration, the approach of an entrepreneur etc. and life-long learning beyond the present area of work.

### ii) Relating to the research question $R_2$ :

Mentoring is a more appropriate intervention rather than teaching for reducing the gap as identified above. A mentor not only helps one to take independent decisions, but she/he also helps in getting unusual experiences as well. For the specific situation being discussed in this paper the guideline for the mentors may be stated as follows.

- The learning environment (Ahmed, Taha, Alneel and Gaffar, 2018) should be conducive to nurturing critical thinking, and life skills with an emphasis on professional collaboration and entrepreneurship.
- The environment should also demonstrate a spirit of life-long learning. For example, there can be relevant courses for the passed-out students (even for those who are in service) of the college. The participation of senior students may be exemplary for the present students.
- Frequent opportunities should be developed where present students can interact with the alumni students in the ever changing job market. Here, approaches of deep

learning should get priority over surface learning approaches. Xie, Zhang and King (2022) demonstrated that learning approach can be changed from surface learning to deep learning and vice-versa, as and when required, with appropriate measures.

- In order to develop critical thinking ability the active learning strategy and the CPR approach (Cho, Melloch and Levesque-Bristol, 2021) may be of immense help.

## 7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The paper studied the perceived returns of higher education for 125 first- semester college students of Jabalpur, M.P., India. The study was in continuation of another study by Mitra (2023) where the perceived returns of higher education for the XII school students of Siliguri, West Bengal, India, were examined. The present study obtained almost similar results. The perceptions of the students were mostly job oriented, and less inclined for deep learning. The students seemed to be less informed about the actual market situation. In addition, this study examined the gap between the perceived returns of the students and the actual potential market situation- dominated returns. The gap was real. A few suggestions based on conceptual analysis were developed for minimising the gap. Those included (i) maintaining a learning environment helpful for nurturing critical thinking, developing life skills with an emphasis on professional collaboration and entrepreneurship, (ii) taking measures for shifting students from surface learning to deep learning and vice-versa and (iii) following the CPR approach in the active learning paradigm.

## 8. REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Y., Taha, M. H., Alneel, S. and Gaffar, A. M. (2018). Students' perception of the learning environment and its relation to their study year and performance in Sudan. *International Journal of Medical Education*. 2018; 9 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6129164/> (Retrieved on 13 May 2023)
- Cho, H. J., Melloch, M. R. and Levesque-Bristol, C. (2021). Enhanced student perceptions of learning and performance using concept-point recovery teaching sessions: a mixed method approach. *International Journal of STEM Education* (2021) 8 <https://stemeducationjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40594-021-00276-1> (Retrieved on 13 May 2023)
- Jensen, R. (2010). The (Perceived) Returns to Education and the Demand for Schooling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, May. [https://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/cega\\_research\\_projects/58/The\\_Perceived\\_Returns\\_to\\_Education\\_and\\_the\\_Demand\\_for\\_Schooling.pdf](https://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/cega_research_projects/58/The_Perceived_Returns_to_Education_and_the_Demand_for_Schooling.pdf) (Retrieved on 04 April 2023)
- Mitra, N. (2023). Perceived Returns for Higher Education: A Case Study with XII Students in Siliguri. *Proceedings of the International Conference Emerging Trends in Indian Education & Culture* held on 28 April 2023 at Siliguri B.Ed. College (to be published).
- Montenegro, C.E. and Patrinos, H.A. (2014). Comparable Estimates of Returns to Schooling Around the World, WPS7020, World Bank Group, Educational Global Practice Group. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/830831468147839247/pdf/WPS7020.pdf> (Retrieved on 04 April 2023)
- Samreen, S. (2017). The Perceived Returns to Education and Demand for Schooling A Case Study of Muslims of Aligarh Ph.D. Thesis, Aligarh Muslim University. INFLIBNET Centre. <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8443/jspui/handle/10603/218617> (Retrieved on 04 April 2023)
- Xie, Q., Zhang, L. and King, R. B. (2022). Why do students change their learning approaches? A mixed-methods study. *Educational Psychology* <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2022.2049708> (Retrieved on 13 May 2023)